

Collecting Railway History

1. **Heading:** Just to put you in the picture. My late husband John Cooper started working on the railways in 1955, he started as a trainee engineman but got sick and was taken off and the footplate and transferred to the Traffic Branch as a guard. After studying to become a Train Controller he got the job and retired in 1997 as Chief Train Controller.

As for myself, I come from a family of railway people. Although most of the family both sides, Mum & Dads were jockeys. I have always had an interest in trains, photography, art, history and lots more.
2. **What is collecting railway history?**

Some might think its collecting engines, doing them up and saving them to run or just restoring them and displaying them in a museum.

These two museums, the Tramway Museum and the Rail Transport Museum have a museum and run tours or rides. They also have a museum building which houses memorabilia and artefacts. There are other museums in NSW and other States such as Queensland's Ipswich Museum, Western Australia's Port Dock, just to name a few.

Their main aim is to keep these engines alive and there for future generations to enjoy, it also generates money to restore the items.
3. Another form of collecting is done by the Australian Railway Historical Society; they collect paperwork, photos books and such. ARHS don't own engine or carriages, but they do hire them off other societies and run tours usually coinciding with historic events or places.

They have a very good research centre and book shop which is at 5 Henderson Road Alexandria. They also put out two Magazines monthly, the Railway Digest and Railway History.
4. Collecting is in the eyes of the beholder, and when it comes to private collectors some collect signalling, some collect crockery or maybe they love taking photos of the entire railway such as trains or for instance the infrastructure etc.

A couple of friends of mine collect railway signalling just like my husband and I did. The first slide is a collection of someone who started collecting when he was fourteen years old and still a school boy. When Matt left school he went into engineering and is very good with restoring and building parts that are missing.
5. This next slide is another friend's collection and he has also done an amazing job of putting it all together. Ashley has been collecting longer than Matt and also is a railway employee. Like my husband and I, these friends attended railway auctions all over Australia and sometimes overseas. We also do a lot of swapping and

helping each other out with parts etc.

With TSCM being a registered museum it made a difference, in that we were also able to be given heritage items to our care.

6. My husband John started collecting seriously when he came up with the idea that the Zig Zag Railway needed a small museum at Clarence to entertain the waiting passengers before the train got back. It took quite a while before the train got back to Clarence and by that time some potential passengers had left.

When the idea was put to the board at the time they decided to vote against it.

John by this time had decided to continue on collecting to start a museum himself.

John was foundation chairman at ZZR and continued to be for 10-12 years.

7. In 1987 John and a good mate of his Ken Macaulay were planning a trike trip from Perth to Sydney as a Bicentenary celebration to salute the pioneering men and women who worked on the railways. Over five weeks they and a core crew pushed the trike from Perth to Sydney, of course along the way there were people waiting to participate by having a go at it themselves.

8. After the trike trip John decided to rent the Cabramatta substation and set up a museum there.

This is where I came into the story. I had joined the Macquarie Valley Railway Society which was based at Wongarbon near Dubbo.

My now son in law who was a driver on the Richmond line was secretary of MVRS but got sick. I was asked to take over his job as secretary. Feeling a bit lost John offered to help me out with some of my duties and I joined his museum Transport Signal & Communications Museum and helped them out as well.

9. The railmotors had been brought down from Wongarbon where they were being stored to join two of Lachlan Valley CPHs in celebrating the 125th anniversary of rail service of the Richmond Line.

10. After the celebrations were over both MVRS and LVR motors were lifted onto stands to have their bogies and underframes tested. In the meantime the electrification at Richmond was progressing and I was recording all the progress of it by taking photos.

11. Of course on the 6th May 1990 3801 had that accident which put a stop to heritage trains running for some time, as a result big changes were made to the way all heritage trains were to run. CPH railmotors were a big problem because they were wooden bodied and they were worried about front on accidents. After some time with enquiries taking place, new laws pertaining to safety on mainline running was brought in. I called a meeting and it was decided to rent the motors out to other societies.

12. I put out a notice and Mountain High Railway wanted to take on No6 and the trailer car 55 that was still at Cootamundra. The Cooma Monaro Group had put in

to lease No22 and 8 but at that we decided to take them and store them at Lithgow State Mine.

When No6 and 55 the trailer car was to Batlow by Mountain High Railway, they dropped No6 and ended up in a bad state. We contacted CMR to see if they were still interested and they agreed to take them. So we hired some cranes and trucks and went to Batlow to retrieve the motors and then onto Tumut to collect the items that had been taken off the motors and stored in the unlocked goods shed, but first we informed the Tumut police as to intentions. Mind you one of us in our group was also a policeman from Cooma.

- 13.**Over a couple of years, two wonderful elderly members of Cooma lovingly rebuilt the railmotors back to near brand new condition. Knowing that the motors were being cared for, the decision was made to ask the Cooma group if they were still interested in the other two. The answer was yes so two trucks were hired and we floated them down to join the other two.

On the 22nd May 1999 I officially handed the railmotors to the Cooma Monaro group. It was a large gathering of townsfolk at the ceremony as well as the Mayor. It was decided to merge MVRS and CMRS together, Cooma taking on board the four life members and anyone from MVRS that wanted to continue with their membership.

- 14.**With the railmotors settled at Cooma it is back to the story of TSCM. My first job there was to create a logo, so we have now gone back to 1990 to where I joined TSCM.

When we first rented the substation it was in a bad way. The roof tiles were broken and water was getting in. There were quite a few working diagrams stored there and the railways weren't interested in them because they were not used anymore. The windows in the substation were all broken so the pigeons had been using it to nest in, all the diagrams and everything else that was in there were all damaged between pigeon poo and water damage. The railways just told us we could have them or dispose of them. It took quite a while to clean the substation out and we got Monier tiles to fix the roof, we also put windows back in and security mesh on the windows so stones couldn't break them again and no one could break in.

- 15.**We were going to set up a typical 50s train at the intended site at Cabramatta and had brought quite a few carriages. We also bought a 44class locomotive, 4420. We had to find somewhere to store it so we asked perway at Lidcombe could we store it in their yard and did this for quite some time. We used to go down at least once a week in the night to start it up to make sure the engine was still OK.

- 16.**Tuesday the 25th June 1991 saw the finish of trains running from Pipitta onto the Homebush Abattoirs and Saleyard Line. The night before John had shifted 4420 to DELEC at Enfield. The next morning he took us back there and we found 4420

coupled up to 4894 and he told us to hop in. He told us we were taking a trip around the saleyards, when we got there the crew of the 48 detached and we took photos of 4420 before it was returned back to Lidcombe.

In 1992 John bought 10 acres of land at Kurrajong, being on railway land between two main lines was becoming very difficult. But in the time we were there we had still been collecting items of what we thought would tell the story of the history of railway for our museum. It took five years of carting everything to Kurrajong. One thing we didn't take with us was 4420. When buying it we did a deal with Keith Jones from the Dorrigo museum that if we were going to sell it he was to buy it for the price we paid for it. This agreement was struck because Keith said he would pull out of the bidding if we agreed to it.

- 17.** We built a large shed to house our two TAM sleeping carriages and an annex to house the museum. We lived in a caravan in it for eight years and then built a flat within the annex. We built the flat out of carriage cedar that we had stripped from carriages over the years. There is an amazing bathroom that was in the house at Canley Vale and we modified it for the flat. A friend Alan Gabbatt who lost his wife came to live with us and together we built a house.
- 18.** Going back again to Easter 1999, John and I move to Kurrajong. We also had to get rid of quite a few carriage and wagons so we sold the BR (passenger car) to the Camden Valley Motors to sit in the Camden station platform as a second hand car office. The KP (travelling post office) and XCM833 were sold to Chris Richards from Rothbury Riot, MCA (passenger car) was sold to Michael Wilson at State Mine Lithgow, who then sold the top half to someone at Bilpin and kept the bogies. There was a MB (Meat wagon) that we sold to a friend that was doing our earthworks on the property. Then lastly the VHO (brake van) was sold to someone in Bathurst.
- 19.** We had three louvre vans, a JLX, a GLX and a LLV; these were burnt in the Christmas Day fires in 2000, and now only one remains and is not in good condition at all. We also lost two other louvre vans, they were coded MLV, one was a half one. These vans were built out of aluminium left over when building fighter planes for WWII. They melted in the fire and everything burnt with them as did in the GLX. The GLX actually had the Clyde carpenters shop stored in it which was going to be reconstructed for a workshop.
We lost a lot in those fires; in fact John went into a bad state of depression because we had lost a lot of significant historical items that couldn't be replaced.
The HCR I had stored at Leightonfield was sold to Chris Richards and what we called the blue car (red rattler painted blue and made into a tool distribution storeroom at Chullora) was sold to a disc jockey in Gundaroo for a radio studio.

20.Wyong Public School contacted us to find someone to take the FL they had in their grounds that was used as a classroom because the education department refused to do any repairs to it. We decided to take it and it is sitting out in our paddock. This carriage was going to be made into a kitchen and of course the other end has tables between the seats.

21.We have Mt Kiera Signal Box but as yet we haven't done too much to it. It is sitting on pigsties waiting for more of the wall to be built under it and has items stored in it. It was going to be restored as a working box demonstrating pulling over the points. We saved two sets of Bullhead rail and track to do the demonstration.

22.Because the museum was called Transport Signals and Communications Museum it opened up another side of collecting. John had joined the Australasian Telephone Collectors Society before I came on the scene but I ended up joining him. Telephones were a big part of the railway as was the Morse code in the earlier years. At first we only stuck to railway communications but over time we expanded it into incorporate others.

Legend has it that Almon Brown Strowger was a mortician that believed his local operator was directing all business calls to his competitor, who happened to be her husband. Strowger felt that subscribers should have control over calls rather than operators. He patented the automatic telephone exchange a.k.a. dial service in 1891, eliminating the need for an operator.

In 1912 Australia's first automatic telephone exchange was installed at Geelong, Victoria. These phones for the PMG were made from timber and painted black. These phones were first used by the railways.

23.In the museum area itself we have displays of clocks, telephones, telephone boxes and exchanges. We have lots of crockery and cutlery, as well as items used in the Railway Refreshment Rooms. Our signalling collection is from all States of Australia, New Zealand and some from overseas. This helps to understand the differences in the equipment

24.These are a couple of photos of the displays that we had set up in our museum itself. Top left is the Blacktown Signal box items; this switch board contains 172 rotary switches. While the Seven Hills signal box panel contains 40 Kellogg's keys and twenty levers, the diagram is part of the panel. Top right is a train control desk. This one is from Werris Creek but is the same as was used at Central Station when my late husband worked there.

25.There are all types of ticket machines and a ticket collection and these are just to name a few. Plus a large ticket collection from all States and some overseas.

26.This photo shows a number six tablet machine that was used at Antiene. We also have a mate to it to make them work. The other three tablet instruments are number sevens, they are NZ but are the same as the NSW ones and all three work

together. The control board you can see top right was the board that the train controller was sitting at when the Granville disaster happened

- 27.** We have done displays for the railways as well as at other places we have been invited to. One of these was the 140th Anniversary of the Railways at Central Station. We had bought some Victorian staff instruments and staffs because at the time no NSW ones were available. A good friend Jeff Moonie got them working for the day and it created a lot of interest.
- 28.** Over the years our museum has done quite a few displays; our first display was at the Australasian Telephone Collectors show at the Fire Museum in Penrith. We took the large staff instruments and some of the signal box equipment. We didn't have the instruments working but the phones were. We did an ATCS display to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the telephone. This was done as a time line
- 29.** We also did the signalling display at Central Station for the railways 150th Anniversary. This time the railways put four of us up in the Mercure Hotel for two nights and also rented the truck for us to transport the display. We had a lot of interest on those days because it seems everyone wanted to pull a staff.
- 30.** We did three Clyde Open Days. These open days were for industries associated with the railways. They had demonstrations of equipment and we were asked to do a heritage display of signalling equipment.
There have been many more displays we have done, these are just a few. Over the years we have enjoyed showing and teaching people how things work. Also at these events we have met people who have donated items to the collection as well.
- 31.**
- 32.** Our paperwork is vast and we have numerous amounts of it stored in plan drawers and filing cabinets. Bob Taaffe just recently took back to Tasmania with him one cabinet full to scan, and he is hoping to be able to copy the rest over time. I was lucky earlier on to be able to get a lot of the paperwork on the Richmond and Kurrajong line; in fact I have some here today to show you so when you get the time you can look at it.
- 33.** My husband passed away in March 2016 and I have tried to continue on with his wishes to be able to open to the public but the Hawkesbury Council have refused to allow it and now it is a private collection.